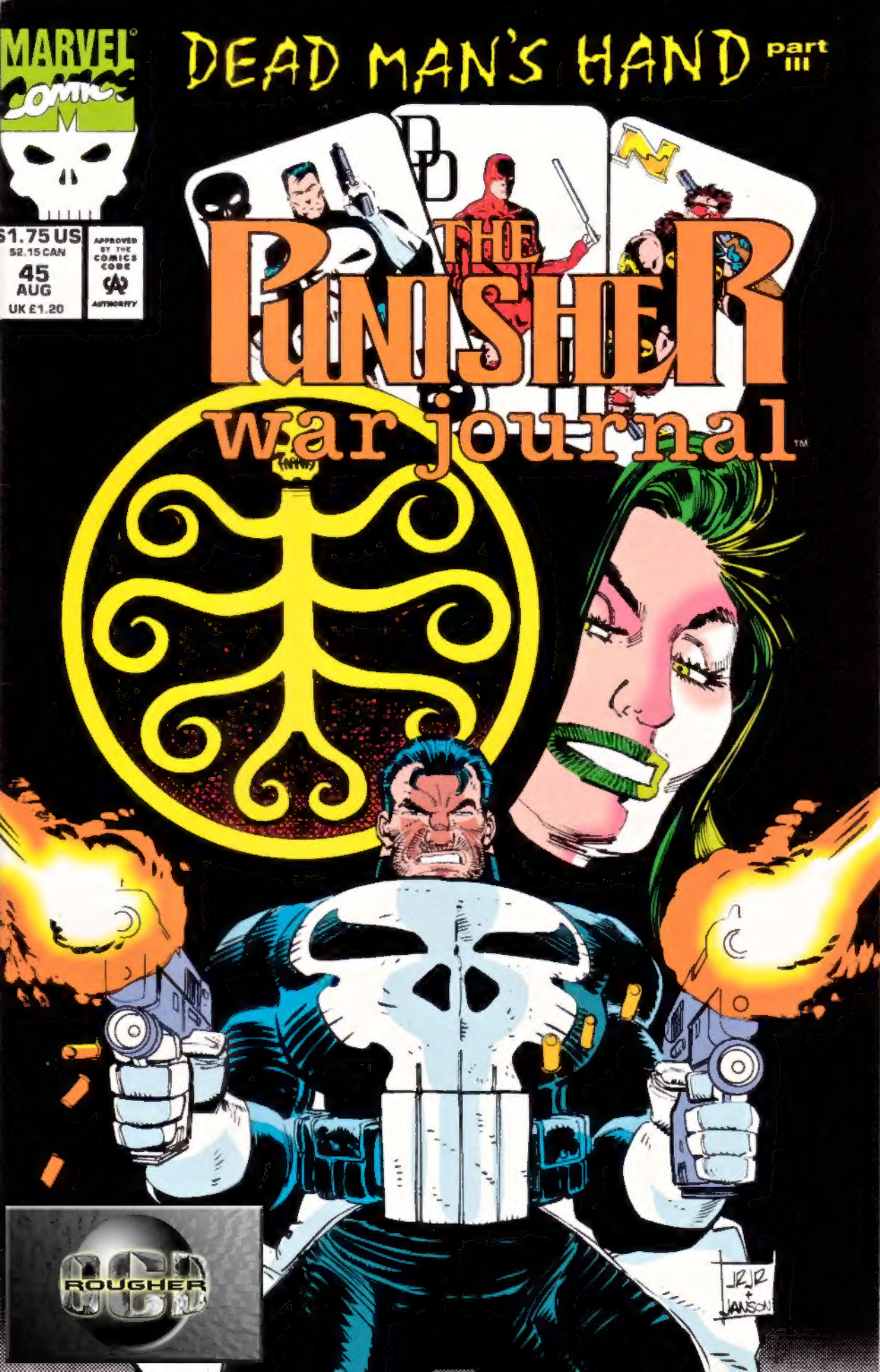
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THE PUNISHER
war journal
ROUGHER
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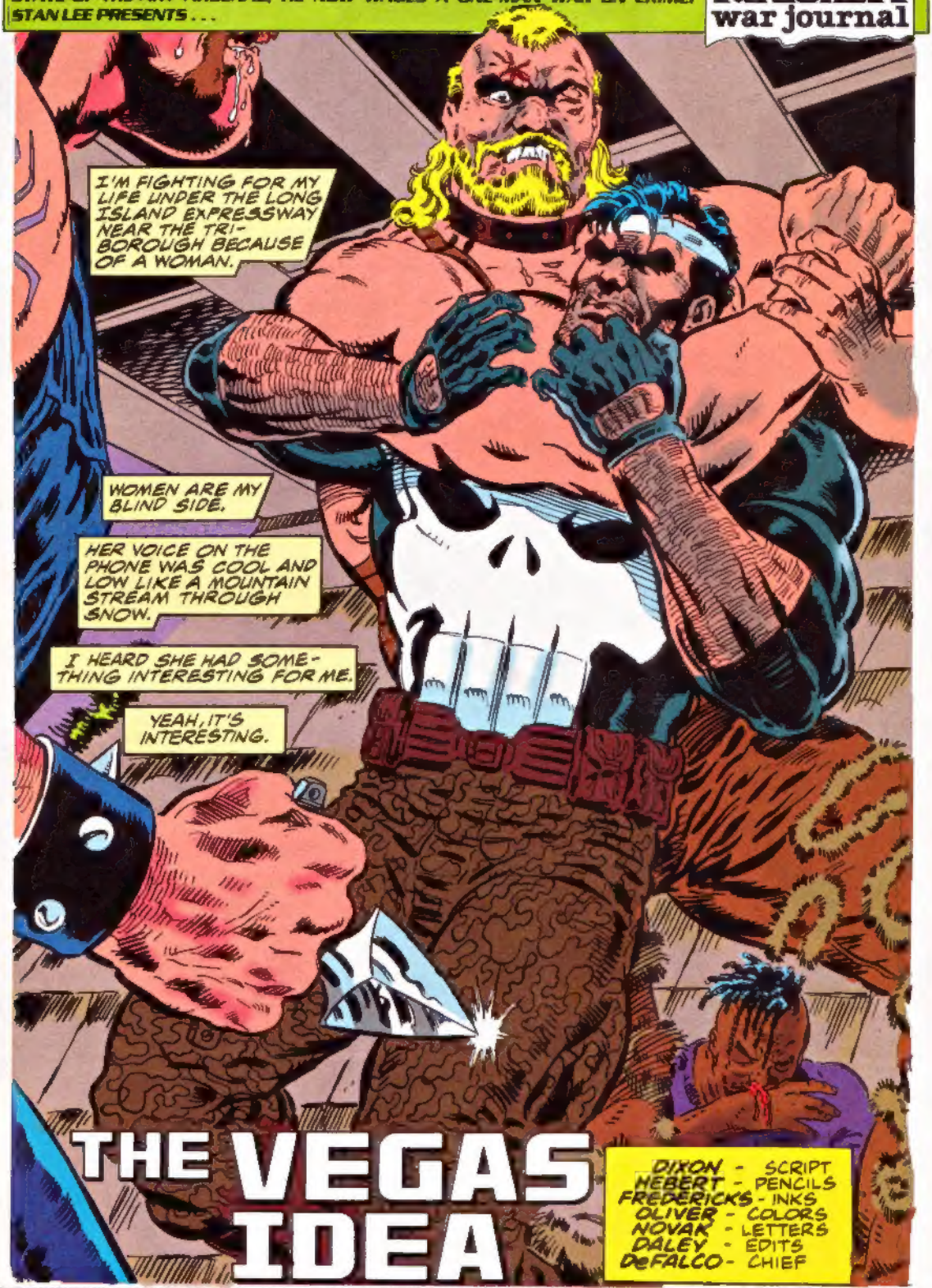
WHEN MOBSTERS SLEW HIS FAMILY, FRANK CASTLE VOWED TO SPEND THE REST OF HIS LIFE AVENGING THEM! TRAINED AS A MARINE, AND EQUIPPED WITH A STATE-OF-THE-ART ARSENAL, HE NOW WAGES A ONE-MAN WAR ON CRIME! STAN LEE PRESENTS . . .

THE PUNISHER war journal



THE VEGAS IDEA

DIXON - SCRIPT
HEBERT - PENCILS
FREDERICKS - INKS
OLIVER - COLORS
NOVAK - LETTERS
DALEY - EDITS
DeFALCO - CHIEF

THE PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL. Vol. 1, No. 45, August, 1992. (ISSN# 1044-4610) Published by MARVEL COMICS, Terry Stewart, President. Stan Lee, Publisher. Michael Hobson, Group Vice President, Publishing. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES. Published monthly. Copyright © 1992 Marvel Entertainment Group, Inc. All rights reserved. Price $1.75 per copy in the U.S. and $2.15 in Canada. Subscription rate for 12 issues: U.S. $21.00; foreign $33.00; Canadian subscribers must add $8.00 for postage and GST. GST #R127032852. No similarity between any of the names, characters, persons and/or institutions in this magazine with those of any living or dead person or institution is intended and any similarity which may exist is purely coincidental. This periodical may not be sold except by authorized dealers and is sold subject to the condition that it shall not be sold or distributed with any part of its cover or markings removed, nor in a mutilated condition. THE PUNISHER (including all prominent characters featured in this issue and the distinctive likenesses thereof) is a trademark of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT GROUP, INC. POSTMASTER: SEND ALL ADDRESS CHANGES TO PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL, c/o MARVEL COMICS, 9TH FLOOR, 387 PARK AVENUE SOUTH, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016. Printed in Canada.

AGGGHK!
THESE GUYS HAVE DONE THIS BEFORE.
THEY WORK LIKE A TEAM.
SHING!
UNNH!
A TEAM OF MORONS.
TATTOOS TELL ME THESE GUYS WERE PRISON THUGS.
EEAAAH!
BIKER TRASH.
MUST BE WARRANTS ON ALL THREE OF THESE LOSERS.
I COULD LEAVE THEM FOR THE COPS TO PICK UP AND THEY'D ALL BE BACK AT RIKER'S BY MORNING.

ROOM AND BOARD ALL ON THE TAXPAYER.
EAT ON THE RIGHT SHIFT AND THE FOOD'S NOT TOO BAD.
BUT THE PRISONS ARE SO CROWDED.
THE COURTS ARE SO JAMMED.
SOMEBODY'S GOT TO CLEAR THING'S OUT.
VERY NICE. VERY PROFESSIONAL.
STEP OUT INTO THE LIGHT. KEEP YOUR HANDS WHERE I CAN SEE THEM.
THAT SILKY VOICE. THE INFORMANT ONE ON THE PHONE.

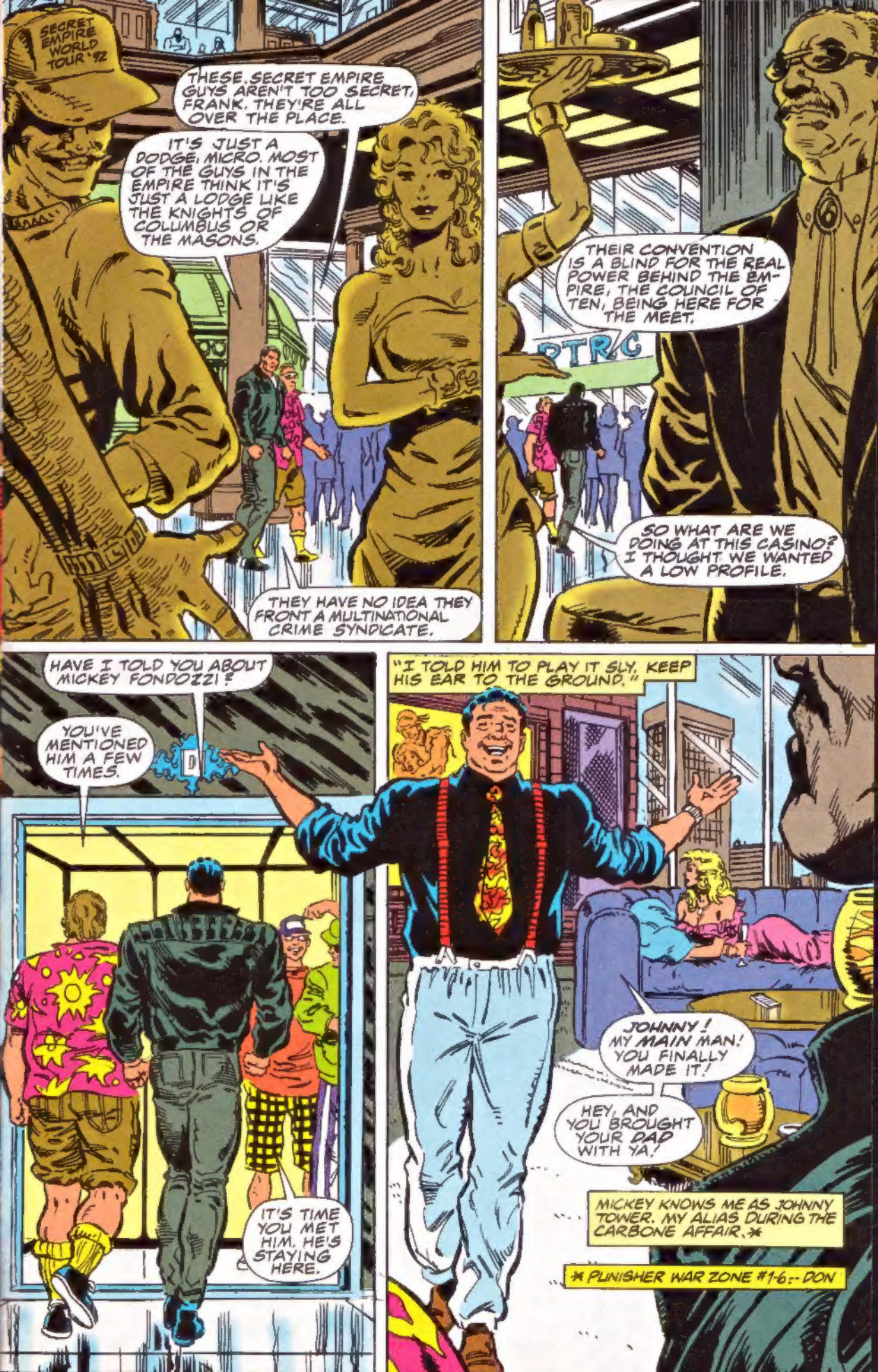
YOU SET ME UP.
I WAS AFRAID I WOULDN'T REACH YOU, AFRAID YOU WOULDN'T COME.
I CAME. WERE THESE MUTTS SUPPOSED TO KILL ME?
THEY WERE A TEST. YOU HAVE A REPUTATION. I WANTED TO SEE IF YOU'D EARNED IT.
I COULD LIVE UP TO MY REP BY CUTTING YOU IN HALF RIGHT NOW.
IF YOU DO YOU WON'T HEAR WHAT I HAVE TO SAY.
I'M LISTENING.
SOME OF THE BIGGEST NAMES IN CRIME ARE MEETING IN A FEW DAYS IN LAS VEGAS. ONE OF THEM IS THE SECRET EMPIRE. YOU'RE FAMILIAR WITH THEM?
THEY'RE MEETING TO DIVIDE THE EMPIRE OF WILSON FISK, THE MAN CALLED THE KINGPIN.
I SEE THAT I HAVE YOUR INTEREST.

KEEP TALKING.
LOTS OF BOSSES. LOTS OF TARGETS. A CHANCE TO CUT THE HEADS OFF A DOZEN ORGANIZATIONS.
YOU'LL BE FALLING OVER CRIMINALS YOU'VE ONLY DREAMED OF GETTING IN YOUR SIGHTS.
YOU DON'T LOOK LIKE THE SOLID CITIZEN TYPE. WHAT'S YOUR END OF THIS?
I HAVE MY REASONS.
I COULD BE A LOT OF HELP TO YOU AND YOUR PERSONAL VENDETTA, PUNISHER.
SEE YOU IN NEVADA.
THE MYSTERY WOMAN'S PROBABLY IN THIS UP TO HER NECKLINE.
I COULD SAVE MYSELF A WORLD OF TROUBLE BY GUNNING HER DOWN RIGHT NOW.
BUT I'VE GOT THAT BLIND SIDE.

MY FIRST STOP IS DEKALB.
THAT'S SIX CASES OF LIGHTS FOR THE PASKOS. TEN FOR LOUIS AND NINE FOR LACY'S MARKET.
BRIIIING!
THAT MIGHT BE MARV. YOU WANNA GET THE DOOR?
ELD IGHTS
LIGHTS
WESTEFELD 100'S
EDDIE, YOU DEAF? I SAID GET THE #9.#@IN' DOOR!
ALL RIGHT, MICKEY! ALL RIGHT!
I DON'T PAY YOU ENOUGH TO HUSTLE?
GUH...GUH...GUH...
AW NO.
THOUGHT I'D STOP AROUND, MICKEY, SEE WHAT YOU WERE UP TO.

YOU! JEEZE! WHY'D YOU HAVE TO GO AND DO THAT TO EDDIE?
HE CAN TAKE A LITTLE JOLT, MICKEY. HOW ABOUT YOU?
LOD
YOU'RE DANGEROUS, MAN!
YOU SEEM TO HAVE FORGOTTEN THAT. YOU FORGOT OUR DEAL. YOU STAY CLEAN AND I KEEP YOU WELL PAID AS AN INFORMANT.
CLEAN? I'M CLEAN.
CIGARETTE SMUGGLING?
SO WHO GETS HURT? WE SELL BUTTS TO THE MOM AND POPS AT A DISCOUNT. SO THE STATE TAX LABEL'S OFF 'EM. SO WHAT?
EVERYBODY GETS CHEAP SMOKES AND EVERYBODY'S HAPPY.
IT'S AGAINST THE LAW.
YOU BREAK EVERY LAW IN THE BOOK JUST WALKIN' AROUND, MAN.
HERE'S A HUNDRED GRAND. I WANT YOU TO GO TO LAS VEGAS AND SET YOURSELF UP AS A HIGH ROLLER.
USE YOUR CONNECTIONS. SOMETHING BIG IS GOING DOWN AND I NEED A PROGRAM OF EVENTS. CAN YOU HANDLE THAT?
I'LL GIVE IT A SHOT, OKAY?
I'M THE EXCEPTION THAT PROVES THE RULE.
SAY WHAT?

ALL NITE
CASINO
ROULETTE
BLACKJACK
NEXT MORNING MICRO CHIP AND I ARE IN VEGAS.
I HATE THIS TOWN.
YOU COULD HAVE RENTED A LESS CONSPICUOUS CAR.
RELAX, FRANK. IN VEGAS THIS IS AN INCONSPICUOUS CAR.
OUR FIRST MOVE IS TO GET A LINE ON THE SECRET EMPIRE. THEY'RE A PARANOID BUNCH AND HEAVILY ARMED AND FINANCED.
IT MIGHT TAKE EFFORT TO FERRET-THEM OUT.
AND THEN AGAIN...
...MAYBE NOT.
THE PALENTINE
LAS VEGAS CHAMBER OF COMMERCE WELCOMES...
THE SECRET EMPIRE!!!
CASINO
$1.99 BREAKFAST


SECRET EMPIRE WORLD TOUR '92
THESE SECRET EMPIRE GUYS AREN'T TOO SECRET, FRANK. THEY'RE ALL OVER THE PLACE.
IT'S JUST A DODGE, MICRO. MOST OF THE GUYS IN THE EMPIRE THINK IT'S JUST A LODGE LIKE THE KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS OR THE MASONS.
THEY HAVE NO IDEA THEY FRONT A MULTINATIONAL CRIME SYNDICATE.
THEIR CONVENTION IS A BLIND FOR THE REAL POWER BEHIND THE EMPIRE, THE COUNCIL OF TEN, BEING HERE FOR THE MEET.
SO WHAT ARE WE DOING AT THIS CASINO? I THOUGHT WE WANTED A LOW PROFILE.
HAVE I TOLD YOU ABOUT MICKEY FONDOZZI?
YOU'VE MENTIONED HIM A FEW TIMES.
IT'S TIME YOU MET HIM. HE'S STAYING HERE.
"I TOLD HIM TO PLAY IT SLY, KEEP HIS EAR TO THE GROUND."
JOHNNY! MY MAIN MAN! YOU FINALLY MADE IT!
HEY, AND YOU BROUGHT YOUR DAD WITH YA!
MICKEY KNOWS ME AS JOHNNY TOWER. MY ALIAS DURING THE CARBONE AFFAIR.*
* PUNISHER WAR ZONE #1-6 -- DON

HOW MUCH OF THE CASH I GAVE YOU ARE YOU BLOWING ON THIS PLACE?
NOT A DIME. THE CASINO COMPED ME THE ROOM WHEN I DROPPED TWENTY GRAND AT THE ROULETTE TABLE.
THE BIMBO CAN TAKE A WALK.
WAITAMINNIT, FRANK. SHE'S NOT--
SHE WALKS, MICK.
SUGAR, HOW'S 'BOUT I CATCH UP WITH YOU LATER?
YOU DROPPED TWENTY GRAND AT THE TABLES.
I GOTTA SYSTEM. I JUST HAVE TO WORK THE BUGS OUTTA IT.
THE ONLY REAL SYSTEM IS COUNTING CARDS AT BLACKJACK.
YOU DONE THAT?
YEAH. IT PAYS OFF. TOO MUCH LIKE WORK.
SO, WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED?
WELL, THESE SECRET EMPIRE GUYS ARE NOTHIN' JUST A BUNCH OF OLD PARTY ANIMALS HERE TO GET HAMMERED AND CHASE TAIL.
BUT THERE'S LOTS OF HEAVY HITTERS HERE. BIG NAMES FROM THE MAFIA AND SOME FOREIGN GUYS.
SOMETHING IS GOING DOWN FOR SURE. YESTERDAY--
WAIT.
YOU HEAR SOMETHING?
LIKE WHAT?

I SHOULD HAVE EXPECTED THIS.
WITH THE CONCENTRATION OF HOODS IN THIS TOWN FOR THE BIG MEET I WAS BOUND TO BE RECOGNIZED.
OMANOMANOMANOMAN!
I JUST DIDN'T EXPECT IT THIS SOON.
I'M TRAVELING LIGHT. JUST TWO COLT GOVERNMENT MODELS.
THE REST OF THE ARMORY IS DOWN IN THE CAR.

THE COLTS ARE LOADED WITH SPECIALTY ROUNDS.
.45 AGENT. MAXIMUM H-SHOCK.
THEY'LL BLOW A HOLE THROUGH A SIDE OF BEEF AT THIRTY PACES.
NO TELLING WHO THESE GUYS ARE WORKING FOR
THEY'RE ALL PRO KILLERS. NOT A SLOUCH IN THE BUNCH.
ALMOST A SHAME TO RETIRE THEM SO YOUNG.
YEAH. ALMOST.

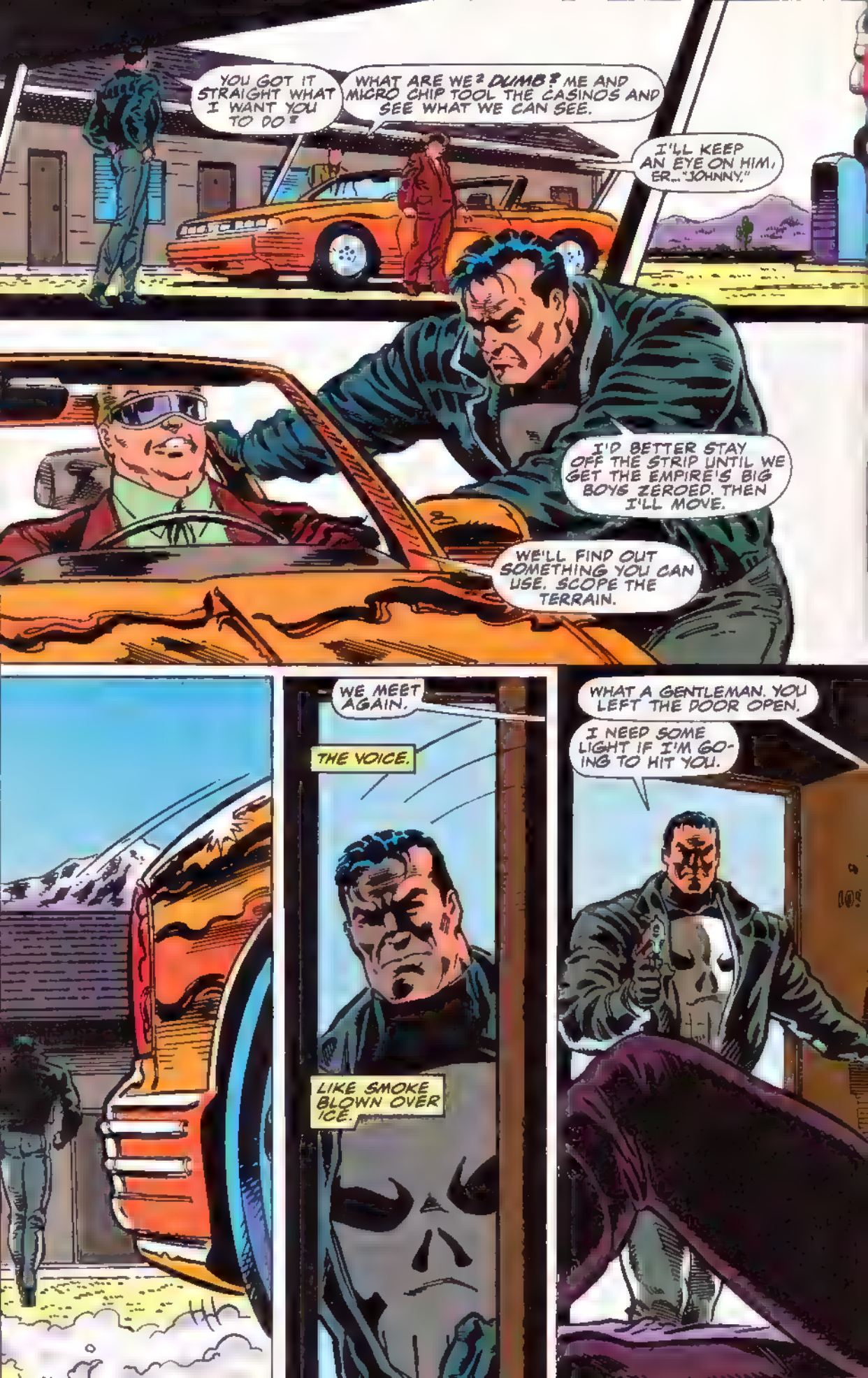
YOU OKAY, UH... "JOHNNY"?
YEAH, IT'S A CINCH WE'RE NOT STAYING HERE ANY MORE.
THEY ALL DEAD?
AS THEY'LL EVER BE. PACK UP YOUR UNDIES, MICK. YOU'RE CHECKING OUT.
I CAN'T BELIEVE I TRADED THAT SUITE FOR AN ICE BUCKET AND A ROLLAWAY IN THIS DUMP.
SHUT UP, MICKEY
MOJAVE MOTOR LODGE
IRONHORSE SHIPPING
"JOHNNY" LIKES THIS PLACE. IT'S AWAY FROM THE ACTION AND IT'S GOT A WIDE KILL ZONE AROUND IT.
YEAH, WELL HE GETS HIS OWN ROOM. SO, MICROCHIP? ARE YOU LIKE HIS FRIEND OR SOMETHING?
FRANK'S NOT THE KIND OF GUY WHO HAS FRIENDS.
MAN, LIKE I CAN'T UNDERSTAND WHY NOT.
GUY USES PEOPLE LIKE THEY WERE KLEENEX.
ONLY REASON I STICK AROUND IS, BECAUSE I'M AFRAID OF WHAT HE'D DO TO ME IF I DIDN'T.
CHECK THIS GUY OUT...

...A ZILLION DEGREES IN THE SHADE AND HE'S DRESSED FOR A BLIZZARD OR SOMETHING
NOTHIN' BUT A BUNCH OF WEIRDOS WHEN YOU GET THIS FAR OFF THE STRIP.
CREAK!

NUMBER THREE, I HAVE SOME DISTRESSING NEWS.
DISTRESSING?
AT THIS JUNCTURE WE ARE TRYING TO ELIMINATE STRESS, DO AWAY WITH COMPLICATIONS.
THE STRIKE TEAM WE SENT AGAINST THE PUNISHER HAS FAILED. FORCHARD AND HIS MEN ARE DEAD.
THEN IT IS NOT ALL BAD NEWS. I WAS SPARED THE TROUBLE OF KILLING FORCHARD FOR HIS STUPIDITY.
THE PUNISHER AND HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE RELOCATED. WE KNOW WHERE THEY ARE.
I WOULD BE PROUD TO LEAD THE NEXT ASSAULT.
NO. I DON'T WANT TO WASTE ANY MORE OF OUR PRIME MANPOWER WE HAVE OTHER MEANS AT OUR DISPOSAL.
THE PRETORIANS?
EXACTLY.
SEND A DOG TO KILL A DOG.

JUST LIKE ONE BIG PARTY! GOT ALL OUR BROTHERS HERE FROM COAST TO COAST!
RIGHTEOUS!
EXCEPT THOSE OF US WHO ARE DOING TIME, OF COURSE!
THIS IS THE BIGGEST GATHERING OF THE PRETORIAN BROTHERHOOD EVER!
PRETORIANS RULE!
CHAIN-SAW RULES!
MUP! MUP! MROWWW!
WE ARE IN VEGAS TO MAKE OUR VOICES HEARD!
GONNA CUT OUR-SELVES IN ON THE BIG BOYS WHEELIN' AND DEALIN'. GONNA CHOP A PLACE FOR THE PRETORIANS NEAR THE TOP!
AMEN, BROTHER CHAINSAW!
AY-MEN!
WE AIN'T JUST ROAD RATS AND WHITE PUNKS ANYMORE! WE ARE A POWER AND WE'RE GONNA SLICE OURSELVES A PIECE OF THE PIE!
WHITE POWER

CHAINSAW, MAN! WE GOT A MESSAGE FROM THE CIRCLE OF TEN!
AW, WHAT DO THOSE DUDES WANT? WE'RE PARTYIN'!
HAVIN' THAT CROWD AROUND IS LIKE HAVIN' PARENTS!
THEY SAY THAT THE PUNISHER IS IN A MOTEL OUT ON ONE SIXTY ONE. THEY WANT HIM WASTED, MAN. HASTA PRONTO.
ALL RIGHT! THE PARTY SHIFTS SCENES AND THE FUN GETS MORE OUTRAGEOUS!
LOCK AND LOAD AND LET'S GET ON THE ROAD! WE GOT A RUN OUT ON SIXTY ONE!
WHAT DO WE DO WITH THE KID?
*%@#¢! WE'LL HAVE TO BRING HIM WITH US!
VIVA LAS VEGAS!


YOU GOT IT STRAIGHT WHAT I WANT YOU TO DO?
WHAT ARE WE? DUMB? ME AND MICRO CHIP TOOL THE CASINOS AND SEE WHAT WE CAN SEE.
I'LL KEEP AN EYE ON HIM, ER... "JOHNNY."
I'D BETTER STAY OFF THE STRIP UNTIL WE GET THE EMPIRE'S BIG BOYS ZEROED. THEN I'LL MOVE.
WE'LL FIND OUT SOMETHING YOU CAN USE. SCOPE THE TERRAIN.
WE MEET AGAIN.
THE VOICE.
LIKE SMOKE BLOWN OVER ICE.
WHAT A GENTLEMAN. YOU LEFT THE DOOR OPEN.
I NEED SOME LIGHT IF I'M GOING TO HIT YOU.

THIS ENOUGH LIGHT, PUNISHER?
CAN YOU SEE EVERYTHING NOW?
WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
I TOLD YOU I WOULD SEE YOU HERE. I BROUGHT YOU MORE INFORMATION IT'S IN THAT FOLDER OVER THERE.
I'VE GOTTEN NOWHERE FAST ON WHAT YOU'VE GIVEN ME SO FAR
WHY SHOULD I TRUST THIS INFORMATION ANY MORE THAN WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY TOLD ME?
EXPLAIN TO ME WHY I SHOULDN'T JUST PUT A BULLET IN YOU AND GO HOME HAPPY

YOU CALL THIS A SYSTEM? YOU AIN'T WON SQUAT, MAN.
MICKEY, COULD YOU KEEP IT DOWN?
THIS CARD COUNTING STUFF IS FOR THE BIRDS!
WE HAVE TO TALK.
YO! THE EAR!
PRETTY TOUGH FOR A FAT GUY, HUH?
TOUGH ENOUGH. I TOLD YOU THAT CARD COUNTING TAKES SOME TIME, RIGHT?
I ALSO TOLD YOU THAT THE CASINOS DON'T LIKE IT. THEY CATCH ME COUNTING AND THEY'LL TAKE US BOTH OUT BACK AND KNEECAP US.
YEAH, WELL, I NEVER HEARDA' SOMETHING SO BORING BEING AGAINST THE RULES. I--
HOLD IT. I JUST SAW SOMEBODY.
I'VE SEEN THAT FACE BEFORE.
WHO'S THAT?
LIKE ON AMERICA'S MOST HUNTED?
IN MY FILES. LET'S FOLLOW THEM.

AND ALL OF THESE HOODS ARE HERE IN VEGAS?
IF THEY'RE NOT ALREADY DEAD, THE MEETINGS AREN'T GOING SO WELL.
WHAT'S YOUR STAKE IN THIS, LADY? TELL ME YOU'RE NOT JUST USING ME AS A SOLDIER HERE.
YOU'RE NOT THE KIND OF MAN I'D LIE TO.
WE SHARE A LOT OF THE SAME GOALS, PUNISHER, A LOT OF THE SAME DESIRES. I KNOW ENOUGH ABOUT YOU TO KNOW YOU CAN'T PASS THIS UP.
DON'T TRY TO PRETEND YOU'RE ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS.
WE BOTH KNOW BETTER THAN THAT.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THE FIRST THING ABOUT ME.
HEY, YOU IN ROOM ONE OH NINE!
IT'S CHECKOUT TIME!

WE WANNA GET IN YOUR ROOM AND CLEAN HOUSE!
R.I.P.
MUP! MUP!
MRRRRROWWWW!
NEXT: HOT CHROME AND COLD BLOOD!

PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL ENTRIES

DON DALEY
editor
TIM TUOHY
assistant editor

Attention Correspondents: All letters to be considered for publication must include your name and address though we will withhold that info by request!

In issue #42 of PWJ we printed a letter from a bloke by the name of Adam Lokey. He wanted to know, plain and simple, "How old is the Punisher?" Well, the letters have arrived, and, as we promised, here's a letters page devoted to just that topic. Get ready, because you're about to learn the age of THE PUNISHER-- *Sort of* . . .

Dear War Journal,

Upon reading the letters page in PWJ #42 I lapsed into deep thought and concentrated on only one thing, the question of the Punisher's age. My answer: 43.

Assuming Mr. Castle was drafted for Vietnam at eighteen in 1967, we can come to the logical conclusion that Mr. Castle is indeed, 43 years of age.

Troy Ernst
6611 Wingard Street
Columbia, SC 2

We'll deal with whether you're right or wrong at the end of this letters page,Troy,but first, we have to clear a little something up. The part where you "assume" Frank was drafted in '67? Frank *enlisted.*

Dear Don and Tim,

I've been reading the Punisher for some time now and his age never really crossed my mind before. But giving it a thought now, he can't be more than thirty-two - at the most! Just look at him. I know he was in Vietnam, but still . . .

My dad *can't* be the same age as the Punisher. The Punisher? My Dad? No way!!!

Roz Lewis
(Address withheld upon request)

Dear PWJ,

To the best of my knowledge the Punisher is 43 years old! Yes, that's right, 43 years old! I feel that if you read between the lines in The Punisher Invades The 'NAM, issue #67, you find the answer. I quote, "It was his third day in country. Kid was still a teenager. Still had sand from Parris Island in his boots." I venture this took place between 1968 and 1969, when Frank was only 19 years old, putting him at 43 years old now.

Edd Lee
P.O. Box 112
Silvana, WA 98287

Dear PWJ,

I've got a real humdinger of a theory (which would reveal Frank's age *if* he existed in our real world). The U.S. began sending troops in 1962. Well, if he joined at the beginning, which I believe he would, and was eighteen, then Frank would be 48 years old now. However, the odds that Frank just happened to be the prime age of enlistment seems a bit far fetched to me, so more than likely he was older than eighteen; this could push the Punisher well past fifty. Imagine that. A middle-aged Punisher. Do I hear a crisis in the brewing?

Chris Grau
(Address withheld upon request)

Hey Don,

As far as Frank's age is concerned I place him in his late 20's to early 30's.

Uncle Elvis
17650 Dawson Road
Dawson Springs, KY 42408

Don,

I saw that you want people to guess the Punisher's age. Now I may be incorrect, but my theory goes like this. I'm guessing he went to Vietnam when he was nineteen. The year is the tricky part to guess. I read through my 'NAM books, and the story was set up so that a soldier was telling another the story of Frank Castle. I think it would take a while for that story to get around, so I'm picking 1968. That would make him 43. Is that too old for a vigilante? I don't know why it matters. Spider-Man has been about twenty-one for almost thirty years. That's comic time for ya.

I have one question about PWJ #42. On page 15, at the top of the page, the Punisher does some dynamic flip while shooting at a criminal. I count 10 spent shells, while I only see 9 hits to the thugs chest. Did he miss? Hard to believe. It had to be a head shot! Right?

Travis Theis
24 Dallington Court
Perry Hall, MD 21128

All right, with the cards down on the table, it seems the majority of you figure Frank at about 43. But some, like Elvis and Roz, figure it a bit differently. Well, right off let's get this out: no one is wrong. Not really. (Except a girl from Texas, who thinks the Punisher is a pumped up sixteen year old). Now before this sounds too much like the 'We don't know, so you're *all* right' answer, let's jump into why. Simply, what we're dealing with here is a phenomenon known as Marvel Time. Chris hinted at it. And Travis came even closer. (For which both will receive a little something in the mail . . .) It's like this. At Marvel, the very idea of time, or more specifically, aging, works differently. Reed Richards and Ben Grimm fought in World War Two, before becoming Mister Fantastic and the Thing; little Franklin has been four and a half for something like ten years now.

In a nutshell, Marvel time arrests, or at least severely slows, the aging process. There are a number of reasons for this. First off, there's the care you, the readers, have for our characters. Do you really want to see Frank at seventy? Or worse, dead? No, you want to see him in his prime. And so will the next generation of comic fans. And the next generation. By using Marvel Time, we allow Frank to be with us for much longer than would otherwise be possible.

Some have said we should let our Marvel characters age, and when they die, we should create new heroes to replace them. Well, there are certainly problems with this, an obvious one being that the Marvel Universe is predominantly populated by heroes and villains in their late twenties to early thirties; if you follow this line of thinking, you'll quickly see the mess this would lead to, namely a bunch of over-crowded retirement homes for invalid Super Heroes. But also, by aging our characters in real time, we would have to tell hundreds of thousands of fans such things as the Punisher is retiring; make room for Punisher Jr!!! And Ghost Rider Jr!!! And, well... you see the point.

Suffice to say, we here at Marvel have given this age thing a lot of thought. We're fans, too. We love this stuff, and you can bet that the kind of thing that you care about--like the age of the characters-- is something that we care about, too.